

OBSERVATIONS

ON THE

IMPROVEMENT

OF

Seminaries of Learning

IN THE

UNITED STATES:

WITH

SUGGESTIONS FOR ITS ACCOMPLISHMENT.

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Instructors should have skill in the *art* or *method* of teaching. It is a great unhappiness indeed when persons, by a spirit of party, or faction, or interest, or by *purchase*, are set up for tutors, who have neither due knowledge of science nor skill in the way of *communication*—for the poor pupils fare accordingly, and grow lean in their understandings. *Dr. Watts.*

PHILADELPHIA:

E. LITTELL, 88 CHESTNUT STREET.

Clark & Raser, Printers, 33 Carter's Alley.

1825.

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OBSERVATIONS.

THE present is a bold and enterprising age. New institutions are springing up with unparalleled rapidity. The physical and intellectual, the moral and political revolutions in the world, seem to be holding an equal pace in the grand march of improvement. America is liberated; Greece is regenerated; Africa is explored; the polar seas are navigated; the currents of rivers, the tides of the ocean, the winds of heaven, are yielding to the breath of a *vapour*; Egyptian wisdom is read and understood, in defiance of hieroglyphics; intellectual philosophy is made a science of experience; comets have found their orbits, and have lost their terrors; astronomical observers are collecting data for the orbit of the sun; La Place and Bowditch are, with great gravity, balancing the universe on mathematical points; commercial restrictions are becoming unfavourable.

shionable; wars of conquest are growing unpalatable to those who pay for them, and national differences have in some instances been settled by amicable mediation; slave dealing is declared piracy, and its suppression provided for by international treaties and conventions; criminal codes are mitigated; religious toleration is beginning to be regarded as a Christian virtue, and even Catholic emancipation has been *spoken of* in England. In our own country, the burden of every speech, from that of the chief magistrate at his inauguration, down to that of the *magniloquent* stripling, who first tries his pinions on a sunny Fourth of July, is "*internal improvement*." Nor are we prepared to assert that the matter ends, in every instance, only in words. Our governors and legislators, in some cases, foreseeing the public interest, and anticipating the demands of the people, have provided liberally and seasonably for the exigencies of the times. In other cases, the people foreseeing that their governors and legislators would not act efficiently in the business, have taken the charge upon themselves, and provided by special legislatures, under the name of conventions, to urge the tardy

course of legal enactments to its due speed. Thus we find, that by one means or another, roads are constructed, canals are cut, rivers are made navigable which were before obstructed, manufactories are established, new channels of trade are opened far beyond our great natural *western canal*, so that the adventurer from the extremity of Maine may now confidently expect, that within seven years his frail vehicle shall be drawn without a change of animals from his home on the banks of the Schoodic, over a continuous route of more than four thousand miles, to the ancient capital of Montezuma. And these things constitute what are called *internal improvements*. But with all due deference to the authority which sanctions the application of this term, we must beg leave to suggest that this is all *external improvement*, and that we have yet to provide, in many parts of our country, for a kind of *improvement* far more *internal*, and we may add, far more *important*. We have to provide for the rearing of a race of "men of wisdom and virtue" to sustain our political institutions; and since all must take part in this duty of upholding and governing the state. *all* men among us must

share in that improvement, which can make them wise and virtuous; an improvement *internal* to the *man*, and not to the *territory* only.

If internal improvements of any kind or for any purpose be desirable, a point which none seem disposed to contest, they can in no respect be more advantageous than when applied to meliorate the social condition, by curing those most distressing maladies, ignorance and moral degradation. Without the removal of these evils, the physical resources of a country may be developed to any extent we please, and poverty and distress be still stalking abroad in their most hideous deformity. The means and incitements to the indulgence of brutal appetites are increased, without any corresponding increase in the high moral restraints upon meanness and sensuality. Why, amidst all these changes, at which we have just glanced, should no change, no improvement, be deemed necessary in the means and institutions of learning?

The expedients for accomplishing this universal improvement in the *internal man* must, however, be eminently practical—intelligible to ordinary capacities—not too fanciful, complicated, and expensive for a whole community,

nor too humble and inefficient for any part. They ought not to perpetuate invidious distinctions of rich and poor, much less to create them. Schools and instructors, with whom the rich may be satisfied, ought to be provided for all classes. Ours ought not to be a system of *poor schools* in any sense; means ought therefore to be devised to make them all good. The practice of most of the States of the Union is in favour of a gradation of institutions, beginning with the common schools and ending with the universities. It is not our purpose at present to discuss either the absolute or relative value of these different classes of seminaries, (believing them *all* useful and necessary in due proportion,) but to offer some suggestions for the improvement of them all. This end is proposed to be accomplished by the introduction of a class of schools hitherto unknown in our country, but for which the public exigencies seem loudly to call, and those are *schools for teachers*. This plan is not offered as in itself a novelty; it has long been in successful operation in some countries on the continent of Europe, particularly in Germany, (a region to which modern learning owes more than the learned are all willing to ac-

knowledge,) and there its beneficial influence is seen in every aspect of society. Some, we are aware, will be ready to object that we have hitherto been supplied, *without* such establishments, with as many teachers as could find employment, and with more than ever *deserved* it. True; and this is precisely the reason for founding institutions which shall afford a supply of *such as may deserve* the public confidence.

It is believed that the demand for good instructors is increasing in our country, in a ratio far exceeding that of the augmentation of our population. This belief is founded upon the consideration that many of the States, which have hitherto been destitute of school systems, are now forming plans for the general or universal diffusion of knowledge: that higher institutions, as well as common schools, are in all parts of the Union becoming the objects of favour and attention, to a degree heretofore unequalled: that in seminaries of every grade, the number of branches expected to be taught, is much greater than formerly: that in every quarter it is beginning to be understood, that under free political institutions, the cause of good learning is the foundation of success to all other good

causes, and that as the public become enlightened on the subject, they are also becoming better qualified to distinguish the able from the imbecile, and those who act from principle from those who follow caprice or sordid interest alone. It is daily made more and more evident, even to those who reflect but little, that every man is not by nature an instructor; a truth which seems to have been overlooked by those who have been ready to employ the weak, untaught, and inexperienced for those offices in which eminent abilities, thorough instruction, and extensive experience are of the utmost importance. Besides, the qualifications of instructors must bear some proportion to the attainments required of their pupils in after life, by the circumstances in which they are to be placed. Adverting, then, to the qualifications *now* demanded of those who are to fill stations of public trust, or to occupy a distinguished rank in the affairs of private life, we may be further convinced of the increasing demand for superior talents and high attainments, in those who are to form the character of our youthful citizens. Not only are our executive and legislative offices, in conformity with the

public wishes, filled with the most eminent scholars of our country; not only do the bar, the bench, and the pulpit demand, as heretofore, the best talents of the community, but our army and navy also are beginning to make high intellectual attainments their principal passports to honour and promotion. Agriculture, manufactures, and commerce, are calling to their aid men of science, intelligence, and liberality of mind; and the impulse given to physical improvements, implies the future demand for a large amount of energetic mental powers. To be ignorant of the rudiments of education, is at present regarded by persons of all ranks, and even of all complexions, as a serious misfortune; and in some parts of our country, as a heavy, positive reproach, to be covered neither by graces of person, respectability of parentage, nor splendour of fortune. Neither the sons nor the daughters of America feel that they have discharged their duty, either to themselves or to their country, until they have redeemed from a state of waste some good portion of that intellectual inheritance which has fallen to their share. Accordingly, we find that in districts of country where yesterday, the first

crash of the falling forest was heard, to-day the voice of science rises from the walls of her neat and classic habitation; and where within the memory of the present generation the shrieking matron was torn from her infant daughter by the ruthless savage, that daughter is *now*, amidst scenes of comfort and elegance, storing her mind with every solid and useful accomplishment, and *possibly* finds by her side, the daughter of that very savage, an ardent but generous rival in the same ennobling employment.

These facts of themselves suggest, that a larger number than heretofore of persons able and willing to devote superior powers to the development of mind and the communication of knowledge, must be employed in these responsible offices. Instead, then, of being regarded as surprising, that a project of this kind should be suggested at all, we ought, perhaps, under a view of all the circumstances, to think it remarkable that it has not been done sooner: that while every other profession has its appropriate schools for preparation, *that* on which the usefulness and respectability of all others essentially depend, is left to the will of chance,

or "*to take care of itself.*" We have theological seminaries—law schools—medical colleges—military academies—institutes for mechanics—and colleges of Pharmacy for apothecaries; but no shadow of an appropriate institution to qualify persons for discharging with ability and success, the duties of *instruction*, either in these professional seminaries, or in any other. Men have been apparently presumed to be qualified to *teach*, from the moment that they passed the period of ordinary pupilage;—a supposition, which with few exceptions, must, of course, lead only to disappointment and mortification. It has often been asked why men will not devote themselves *permanently* to the profession of teaching. Among other reasons, much weight is, no doubt, to be attached to this want of preparation, and to the discouragements and perplexities encountered in blindly attempting to hit upon the right course of procedure. Many persons, we have reason to believe, commence the business of instructing, not only with few of the qualifications for communicating knowledge, but even without any fixed plan of proceeding, or any definite ideas of the peculiar duties and difficulties of

the employment. With such persons, the operation is altogether *tentative*—a system of temporary expedients—or, no system at all. They begin *somehow*—follow one course for a time, then drop it for another, which (finding it equally unsuitable) they abandon for some new project, that chance or caprice brings in their way, or, which is perhaps more common, after having found their good intentions unappreciated, and their labours unrewarded, they abandon in disgust both the plan and the profession together. And happy will it be, if in this unprofitable course of groping in the dark, they have done nothing worse than to fail in attaining the object of their pursuit;—happy if they have not wasted their health, impaired their mental energies, diminished their social propensities, and lost their relish for the refinements of literature and the researches of science.—To obviate in some degree these difficulties, to render his duties less irksome to the teacher, and more profitable to the pupil—to give to our institutions of learning (already the subjects of much applause) a still higher character, and thereby to subserve the interests of our country and of humanity, it is pro-

posed to afford, by the institutions in question, an opportunity, to those who are designed for teachers, of making themselves theoretically and practically acquainted with the duties which they will be called upon to discharge, *before* they enter upon the performance of their trusts. In order, however, to afford illustrations of the principles of education, it is indispensable that *practice* should be added to precept, and that too, in situations favourable to the operation of those causes which display both the powers of the mind, and the peculiarities of the several departments of science and art. The school for teachers, then, ought not to be an insulated establishment, but to be connected with some institution, where an extensive range in the sciences is taken, and where pupils of different classes are pursuing the various departments of education adapted to their respective ages. The practice of superintending, of arranging into classes, instructing and governing, ought to form *one* part of the duty of the young teacher. The attending of lectures on the science of mental development, and the various collateral topics should constitute another. An extensive

course of reading and study of authors who have written with ability and practical good sense on the subject, would be necessary, in order to expand the mind, and free it from those prejudices which, on this subject, are apt to adhere even to persons who fancy themselves farthest removed from their influence. The present is not an age when narrow prejudices of any kind can be expected to enjoy toleration and support; and least of all, can such favour be expected for the prejudices of instructors, who, from the very relation in which they stand to their pupils, ought to be foremost in eradicating the absurd notions which a false estimate of things, and a wrong application of terms, have implanted in the mind. That this is not at present the characteristic of instructors, there is but too much reason to fear; and that the course here recommended would beget a more liberal spirit, there is every reason to hope. That class of prejudices, in particular, which arises from a disposition to form or adopt fanciful theories not reducible to practice, would be corrected by reading the kind of authors here recommended; and the same effect would be insured by adhering, in

the choice of lecturers, to those, who, added to a truly philosophical character, have possessed an extensive *experience* in the duties of instruction. Should it be necessary, there might also be provision for the pursuit of other sciences in addition to that of teaching, by those who are preparing for that office. A perfect plan for the education of teachers and professors, would require that the institution, with which the school for teachers is proposed to be connected, should embrace a complete circle of the Sciences and Arts, and that a professor should be appointed to lecture on the mode of teaching in each separate department. But besides that few, if any institutions of our country extend to so great a number of objects, there would be an insuperable obstacle to the execution of such a plan, in the *expense* which must necessarily be incurred—an expense, which no authority short of the highest legislative body in the nation would, perhaps, feel itself adequate to meet—and *that* body has hitherto shown an aversion to extend its interpretation of “the general welfare” so far as to embrace the trifling subject of educating the sons and daughters of a republic.

In view of these difficulties, therefore, it would be advisable, at least for the present, to extend the plan no farther than to comprehend:—

I. A course of lectures and practical illustrations on the subject of *intellectual philosophy*, as connected with the science of education.

II. A course on *physical education* and *police*.

III. On the mode of conveying instruction in the *exact* and *physical sciences*, and the various descriptive and mechanic arts.

IV. On the manner of teaching languages, belles lettres, history, and, in general, all those branches commonly classed under the *philological department*.

Each course must of necessity embrace a large number of particulars. Each has some affinity in its topics to all the rest, but not so near as to cause one lecturer essentially to encroach on the province of another.

The first course would embrace the subjects of resemblances and differences in the capacities of different individuals; the proper season for developing each faculty; the kind

of study adapted to produce that development; the intermixture of different pursuits suitable to store and discipline the mind at different ages;—the anomalies of talent which have been noticed or recorded, and their causes so far as known;—the influence of moral causes upon the intellectual character of youth; and, in general, the effects of all the various departments of science, literature, and arts, and of the different modes of presenting them to the mind, towards perfecting the human understanding and character.

The second of the abovementioned courses would include all that relates to the management of infancy, the personal habits, form, physiognomy, and health of children and youth, and their different capabilities of learning, so far as affected or *indicated* by these circumstances; the manners, exercises, amusements, indulgences of young persons, especially when employed in their education; the time and manner of attending to study, conveniences for private study and public recitation; arrangement of class rooms for different purposes to be illustrated by drawings; the maintenance of order and expedients for enforcing it, together with

the nature and application of stimulants, rewards, and punishments, and the temper, language, and general demeanour of instructors.

The third department of lectures would include the theory and practice of teaching in the several branches of common education, such as orthography, reading (mechanically), writing, arithmetic, and geography; the pure and mixed mathematics, physical astronomy, natural philosophy, chemistry, botany, mineralogy, anatomy, drawing, engraving, horticulture, and mechanic trades.

The last course would comprise directions to professors and teachers in a great diversity of branches, including not only the subjects usually taught at seminaries of learning, but also those which pertain to the several learned professions. Among these may be mentioned rhetorical reading, composition, logic, metaphysics, foreign and learned languages, history, chronology, law, theology, and medicine.

The auditors ought to receive advice and instruction from the lecturers in respect to their course of reading on the several topics presented in the lectures, and be arranged, and taught as their own pupils are to be afterward, in classes according to their several capacities and

attainments. As the auditors are supposed to be engaged, a part of their time, in the practice of instructing, it will become the duty of the lecturers to attend and observe their mode of conducting the exercises of their respective classes, and to comment upon it at subsequent lectures; affording to all an opportunity for free discussion and candid interchange of opinions on every topic arising out of the practice of a teacher. The course here marked out, might, probably, with the time taken up in practical teaching, occupy at least one year, and at the expiration of that time, a certificate might be given to each individual, stating the length of time he had employed, the qualifications he had exhibited, and the success he had attained in the several branches of instruction. It is, however, presumed, that in this case, the candidates for approbation had come to the institution, well grounded in all those branches of learning, of which they proposed to become teachers; otherwise a longer time might be required. In the former case, the *instructions* given them by the lecturers on education would have for their object, to render them more familiar with the several subjects by frequent and careful *revisions*. In addition to this, some

well digested treatise on the subject of education might be selected, and studied; recitations being conducted after the manner of those in history or ethics. The lecturers might further be serviceable to the cause of education, by establishing and conducting, on liberal and philosophical principles, a *journal* to be devoted to that subject, and to embrace such kinds and varieties of objects, as might render it instructing and entertaining, to youth, to parents, and to instructors.

As to the means of supporting the establishments now proposed, it may be suggested that the individual States would be the proper authorities to decide upon that matter, each in the way most compatible with its situation and interest. In most cases, one institution would be adequate to the necessities of a whole State. In the larger States, two might be required. Suppose the four lecturers to receive \$1200 each annually, and that the expense for rent of lecture rooms, books, apparatus, and contingencies, were \$1200 more; the whole would then amount to \$6000 per annum. Let two-thirds of this sum be paid from the state treasury, and the remainder be raised by assessments upon the individuals attending the lec-

tures, exceptions being made in favour of those whose circumstances require a relief from such a tax. It is believed the sum here supposed would be amply sufficient to command distinguished talents in the lecturers, and to procure every necessary accommodation for the institution. Some States would perhaps feel it to be consistent with their *dignity* to sustain the whole expense, and others might deem it necessary for their *interest* to impose a larger proportion upon those who enjoyed the immediate benefits of the establishment. In either case it will be recollected, that the common schools are to be principally benefited by the *schools for teachers*, and that therefore the public at large will have the deepest interest in rendering them as excellent as possible. Should any State assume the whole expense, it might be a proper regulation to permit each county, township, or other territorial division, to send its quota of the students, according to its proportion of representation in the State legislature. And here it will perhaps be eagerly inquired, which of the many plans of education that are afloat in the world we would propose as the basis of the institution now contemplated?—We answer, *all of them*, and *none of*

them.—*All of them*, because we think each has some peculiarity worthy of study and imitation;—*none of them*, because we apprehend no one is in itself alone adapted to the demands of society, and to the great ends which a system of universal education ought to accomplish. Some are applicable to particular branches,—some to the rearing of men for particular professions,—some are adapted only to a very *poor*, and others only to a very *rich* community—the former admitting but a meagre list of studies, and the latter requiring such quantities of trappings and machinery for the operations of a school, as can seldom be afforded by those whose interests ought most to be consulted. Let all, then, be discussed fairly and impartially; let their excellencies and defects be seen, and every capability of improvement pointed out. Let the *practical* part of each be *put in practice*, and the fanciful and complicated be remembered as a monument of the ingenuity of its projector—like many of those neat and elegant models in our patent-office, of machines very pretty, and very marvellous in themselves, but withal very *useless*. It will of course be an important duty of the *lecturers* on education to present the fruits of

laborious research into these several plans, to the minds of their auditors—divested alike of the prepossessions of their inventors, and of the prejudices of rivals. But a far more arduous task will be imposed upon them by the necessity of explaining the principles and practice of teaching as founded on the principles of human nature. Taking the human character as we find it, and not such as our wishes or imaginations would make it, we are bound to apply to the best purposes, all the lights which reason, and that intellectual philosophy, which we have before said, has of late been made a science of experience—can afford, for the improvement of our modes of mental culture. But whatever new plans of communicating instruction, may, by means of philosophical inquiries, be devised, there is little hope of changing the laws of nature, of extinguishing the inherent passions of the heart, or of implanting a new set of faculties in the head. The recipients of knowledge, therefore, must be similar in all ages, to what they are now, with the exception, perhaps, of possessing a few less hurtful prejudices to retard the course of improvement. The substance of the soil remains the same, but the mode of treatment,

the time of sowing, and the quality and variety of articles sown, may essentially affect the profit as well as the pleasure of cultivation. To find out the most effectual and expeditious methods of maturing the faculties, and storing the mind, to put the scholar on the surest course of self-advancement, and to supply suitable stimulants to curiosity and industry, are the valuable ends to be attained by philosophical inquiries into the science of education. The peculiar *circumstances* in which either individuals or communities may be placed, are also worthy of attention; but without running into subtilties to settle the extent to which man may be regarded as the *creature of circumstances*, it is enough that every man knows that he possesses power over many events, and can, at pleasure, bring together the adverse or the favourable, for the purpose of giving a direction to the wishes and pursuits of his fellow beings. To bring together such as shall give a *right* direction to the desires and pursuits of *youth*, will of necessity furnish ample scope for the exercise of the greatest skill, and most accurate discrimination. And what branch of *improvement* will you place in competition with this which aims to improve the noblest,

but at the same time most improvable of the works of God? What machine will you invent, to be compared to that grand moral engine, an enlightened and *consequently public-spirited*, community? Tell us not of the roads you have made, while the paths of science are obstructed; nor of the rivers whose channels you have cleared, while the streams of knowledge are choked and muddy. Point not to our free constitutions of government, while a man that lives under them is too ignorant to understand or appreciate their provisions; for where *ignorance* is, there will be *slavery*, however artfully or popularly disguised. And let us not be content even with the display of *national gratitude*, to our benefactors, while that display falls short of complying with the wishes of our Penns, our Franklins, and our Jeffersons, in relation to the moral and intellectual condition of their descendants—of the present and all future generations of the American people.

Note.—It is intimated, page 13, line 22, *et seqq.* that no attempt has heretofore been made, to draw the attention of the public to the subject of the foregoing *observations*. It is believed that at the time they were *written*, it was strictly true. After the copy was, however, put into the hands of the printer, the author learned from a *list of new publications*, that something of the same kind had been undertaken by Mr. Gallaudet, of the American Asylum at Hartford. Since the impression was partly completed, he has received, and read the pamphlet of that gentleman, entitled a "*Plan of a Seminary for the Education of Instructors of Youth*;" and is happy to find the subject so warmly and ably discussed, and that too, by one whose name and character have been long and favourably known to the community.



